A SERMON

Preach'd on the

Unpardonable Sin

AGAINST THE

Holy Ghost;

OR, THE

Sin unto Death.

Wherein is declared, A plain Deſcription of it, both Negatively what it is not, and Poſitively what it is; and a plain Reaſon why it is Unpardonable.

With a Word of Comfort, and alſo of Counſel, how to avoid it.

By *R. Ruſſel*, of *Redburſt*, in *Suſſex*.

Hebr. X. xxvi. *If we ſin wilfully, after we have receiv'd the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for Sin.*

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There is a Sin unto DEATH.

1 John 5, part of the 16 Verse.

THIS Sin, which St. *John* calls *the Sin unto Death*, is the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, deſcribed by our Bleſſed Saviour, *Mat.* 12. 22. that whoſoever commits it, hath no Forgiveneſs, neither in this World, nor in the World to come: For all manner of Sin and Blaſphemy, againſt the Holy Ghoſt, ſhall never be forgiven unto Men; and he that ſpeaketh a Word againſt the Son, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, ſhall never be forgiven, neither in this World, nor in the World to come. This Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, that is, that Sin, which St. *John* calls here a *Sin unto Death*, tho' not only becauſe that Sin deſerves Death, for ſo do all Sins deſerve Death, both *Temporal* and *Eternal*; for the Wages of Sin (even all) is Death, *Rom.* 6. But that Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is call'd, *The Sin unto Death*, becauſe it binds a Man over to Death, without any poſſibility of Recovery: Now, ſome there be that go from one degree of Sin to another, that delight in, and aggrivates their Sins more and more, until they are brought to that heighth at laſt, as to commit that Sin, for which there is no Forgiveneſs.

There is no meer Man, ſince the Fall, that can live without Sin; for all are Sinners, yet there are degrees of Sin; ſome Sins, in their own Nature, are ſmall; others, are more great and heinous. Many Sins there are that are great, yet

unpardonable, and one Sin ſhall have no Forgiveneſs, muſt for ever bear the weight and puniſhment, both of that, and all his other Sins.

There is ſuch a Sin as *St. John* ſpeaks of here in my Text, that is, *the Sin unto Death.*

And now I come to the Explication of the Words, from whence I ſhall raiſe this point of Doctrine; That amongſt other Sins, committed by fallen Mankind, there is one Sin, that is a Sin unto Death; and whoſoever commits that Sin, hath no Forgiveneſs, neither in this World, nor in the World to come.

Now, for my further proceeding on the Subject, I ſhall lay open to you;

Firſt, What the Sin unto Death *is.*

Secondly, That all other Sins, how great and heinous ſoever, may be forgiven.

Thirdly, That this Sin alone ſhall never be forgiven.

Fourthl, The Reaſon why this Sin is unpardonable. And,

Laſtly, I ſhall conclude with a few Words of Application.

I ſhall begin, Firſt, with this unpardonable Sin, where I ſhall endeavour to make as plain a Deſcription of it as poſſible I can; and in ſo doing, I ſhall ſhew you, negatively, what is not this ſin; 2dly, I ſhall ſhew you, poſitively what it is.

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew you, negatively, what is not this ſin unto Death, or in what degree a Man may ſin, and yet not commit that unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

1ſt, It is not every quenching of the motions of the Spirit that is ſin. It is true, when the Holy Ghoſt comes with a ſtill Voice, and knocks

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at the Doors of ſinners Hearts for Entrance, he often comes and ſtrives with them, and ſecretly woes and beſeeches them to leave their Sins, and be converted: Yet they quench and ſtifle all his Motions, and bear up their Hearts againſt him, and will not be obedient to his Heavenly Calls: Now, ſuch ſin is grievouſly againſt the Holy Ghoſt; for many, who have often ſtood it out a long Time, and have quench'd and griev'd the Holy Spirit, yet, at laſt, they have been wrought upon to ſincere Converſion.

2dly, A Man may commit many heinous and crying Sins, and yet not be guilty of the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. A Man may be an *Idolater*, a *Whoremonger*, a *Fornicater*, a Murderer, and work *Witchcraft*, and ſin with a very high Hand: Nay, he may lie in all manner of Filthineſs and Lewdneſs, and yet not be under the guilt of unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Thus we read, 2 *Chron.* 33. That [illegible] ſinned with a very high Hand, was an *Idolater*, an *Inchanter*, and worked *Witchcraft*; dealt with *familiar Spirits*, and wrought much Evil in the ſight of the Lord: And *Mary Magdalen had ſeven Devils caſt out of her.* Luke 8. ver. 2. and yet both were pardon'd.

3dly, A Man may ſin preſumptuouſly againſt great Light and Knowledge, and yet not commit this ſin unto Death; for *Peter*, when he denied Chriſt, he did it againſt great Knowledge of Chriſt, he knew Chriſt to be his Lord and Saviour; he was one of Chriſt's beloved Diſciples; and for all that, how ſtrongly he denied Chriſt, that with an Oath too; and yet for all that, Chriſt look'd upon him with a merciful Eye and he repented, and was forgiven.

4thly,

4thly, It is not every malicious sin that is the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; for St. *Paul* certainly had great malice in his Heart when he went on so furiously to persecute the Church of God, yet he was converted, and became a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, who before persecuted.

5thly, and lastly, It is not sinful Unbelief, nor final Impenitence, that is the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; tho' some be of Opinion, that it is because that sin is Unpardonable; and Christ himself hath said, *Matt.* 12. ver. 31. *That all manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto all Men, except the Sin against the Holy Ghost.* But you are to take our Saviour in the right sense and meaning; It is all sin and blasphemy committed within the compass of Man's Life that shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for the Sin of final Impenitency, and final Unbelief, is not compleated 'till the moment of Man's Death; and then you all know, that there is no Repentance, and consequently, no Pardon after Death: For Christ saith, *He that sins against the Holy Ghost, hath no forgiveness, neither in this World, nor in the World to come.* Now, *Why should Christ say in this World, if there be no space to be given in this World?* But a Man may commit that unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost, especially many Years before Death: Besides, there are many Thousands that die in Impenitency and Unbelief, and are damn'd, and yet never commit the unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost. Thus I have shew'd you, negatively, what is not this unpardonable Sin; none of these sins in particular, is that sin.

Secondly

Secondly, I come to ſhew you, poſitively, what this ſin unto Death is, and wherein this unpardonable ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt doth conſiſt.

Now, in the firſt place, you muſt know, that there are two ſorts of People that cannot commit that ſin; Firſt, The true Believers cannot commit it, tho' many Times for their tryal, God ſuffers them to fall into many grievous ſins; yet they being rooted in Chriſt, they are upheld by free Grace and Mercy, that they cannot fall into this unpardonable Sin. Secondly, The groſly Ignorant cannot commit it, becauſe it is a ſin againſt the great Light and Knowledge; ſome have both Light and Grace; theſe ſhall not commit the unpardonable Sin. Again, ſome have neither Light nor Grace, theſe cannot commit it: But there are ſome again that have Light and no Grace; theſe are they that are liable to commit the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Now, there are two Ingredients to make up this unpardonable Sin, that is, Light in the Head, and Malice in the Heart; without theſe two, the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt cannot be committed: For to ſin againſt great Light and Knowledge, is not that ſin alone; nor yet to ſin Ignorantly out of Malice is not that ſin, but they muſt joyn both together to make up this unpardonable Sin. Thus we plainly ſee, by the Example of St. *Peter* and St. *Paul*, *Peter* he denied Chriſt, and forſwore himſelf too, and that grievouſly againſt Light and Knowledge; for he knew Chriſt to be the only begotten Son of God, and he knew God in him: He was one of Chriſt's Diſciples, and one of his beloved Diſciples too; He was taught of Chriſt, and has experimental Knowledge of his Love and Favour, an yet he wickedly, with an Oath, denied

nied him. Now, if *Peter* had done this out of malice and ſpight, he had committed that ſin unto Death, for which there is no Forgiveneſs; but *Peter* had no malice in his Heart all this while, even at the Time when he denied Chriſt, as you may ſee, *Matt.* 29. when Chriſt told him, before the Cock crow twice, thou ſhalt deny me thrice: He anſwer'd, If I ſhould die with thee, I will not deny thee.

And then denying him thro' infirmity and weakneſs of the Fleſh, when he had conſider'd what he had done, he wept bitterly. *Matt.* 26. 27. And *Paul* he had a great malice and ſpight againſt the Ways of God, as you may ſee *Acts* 9. 1. *Paul breathed out threatnings and ſlaughter againſt the Diſciples of the Lord*, &c. Now, by theſe two places of Scripture, you may plainly ſee, that *Peter* ſinned againſt great Light, and *Paul* out of great Malice; yet neither of them committed the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Now, as all other ſins, ſo this ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, may be committed in Thought, Word, or Action.

1ſt, In Thought, that is, when the wicked Man, againſt his Light and Knowledge, doth both conceive a malicious thought, or purpoſe, towards perſecuting the Goſpel of Chriſt, to hinder the Work of the Holy Ghoſt in them.

2dly, This ſin may be committed in Word too; that is, when a Man ſpeaks blaſphemouſly and maliciouſly of Chriſt, and his holy Way; this was the ſin of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, *Mark* 3. 22. *There were certain Scribes came and ſaid, this Fellow hath Belzebub, and caſteth out Devils by the Prince of Devils.* Therefore, ſaith Chriſt unto them, ver. 28. 29. *Verily I ſay*

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unto You, all ſins ſhall be forgiven unto all the Sons of Men, and blaſphemies, wherewith ſoever they blaſpheme; but whoſoever ſhall blaſpheme againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of Eternal Damnation.

Now, the reaſon of this Speech of our Bleſſed Saviour, is ſhew'd in Ver. 20. becauſe they ſaid, he hath an unclean Spirit; which plainly ſhews, that the Scribes had ſpoken Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt: Theſe Scribes were great learned Men, they could know no other but that Chriſt was the Son of God, and they knew that he caſt out Devils by the Spirit of God; and yet they, out of ſpight to Chriſt, malicioufly and blaſphemouſly ſaid, that he caſt out Devils by Belzebub the chief of Devils. Thus theſe Scribes committed the unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt in Words.

3dly, This ſin may be committed in Action too; that is, when a Man being throughly Enligten'd, and enter'd upon a holy courſe of Life, and taſted of the Comforts of God's Spirit, and had ſome taſt of the Joys of Heaven, and not only makes profeſſion of the Goſpel, but teaches it others, he at laſt takes a diſlike to theſe holy Courſes, and thro' ſpite and malice, utterly forſake, oppoſe and proſecute theſe good Ways of God, which he before profeſt and taught.

But to ſum up this Point; This unpardonable Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is fully deſcribed by the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews*, chap. 10. 26, 27, 29. *For if we ſin wilfully after we have receiv'd the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for Sins, but a fearful looking for of Judgement, and fiery Indignation; how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall he be thought worthy, who*

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hath troden under-foot the Son of God, and counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing, and have done deſpite to the Spirit of Grace. Likewiſe, *Heb. 6. 4. 5. 6. For it is impoſſible for thoſe, who were once enlightned, and have taſted of the heavenly Gifts, and be partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and taſted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to Repentance; ſeeing they crucify afreſh to themſelves the Son of God and put him to open ſhame.*

Now the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is briefly thus, It is a malicious and wilful oppoſing the known Truth, joyned with final Apoſtacy.

I ſhall a little explain theſe Words, and then proceed

Firſt, This ſin unto Death is an oppoſing ſin; now to oppoſe a thing, is to contradict, or gainſay it; when a Man ſays a thing is ſo and ſo, he denies it, and ſays it is not ſo; when a Man ſays nothing muſt be done, he ſays again, it muſt not, it ſhall not be done; ſuch an oppoſition is in the Heart of him that commits this unpardonable Sin; but a Man may be an oppoſing Man, and yet cannot commit this ſin: Therefore,

Secondly, It is the Truth that we muſt oppoſe, that is, we muſt entirely oppoſe and reject Chriſt, who ſaid, *I am the Truth, John* 14. 6. He oppoſes all his threatnings, and will not believe his promiſes, and counts him a ſeducer of the People, and counts the blood of the Covenant to be an unholy Thing, nay, he alſo oppoſes the Spirit of Chriſt, which is the Spirit of Truth; ſothat he will not obey his Motions, and will not be held or guided by him; but the Man may oppoſe the Truth, and yet do it ignorantly.

Thirdly, it must be the known Truth that he oppoſeth; he muſt be once enlightned: But you muſt know, that it is not a notional Knowledge, and human Learning; he may know much of God, and of his Will in the Letter of the Word, and yet not be capable of committing this unpardonable Sin; but he muſt be ſo far enlightned as to ſee the evil that is in ſin, and the excellency of Chriſt; he muſt taſt of the heavenly Gift, and be made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and taſt of the good Word of God and the Powers of the World to come, and by the Blood of the Covenant, which he counts as an unholy Thing he is in part ſanctified and cleanſed from many ſins, he muſt have ſweet Communion with God in his Word and Sacrament, he muſt have ſome taſt of the Love and Favour of God, and Comforts of his Spirits, and be refreſhed by it, and taſt of the Joys of Heaven, and have ſome foretaſt of the Happineſs of the World to come.

Fourthly, He muſt oppoſe the known Truth wilfully; he muſt wilfully fall away after he hath receiv'd the Knowledge of the Truth, other ſins are committed thro' infirmity, but this ſin is wilful: The *Will* is the chief Actor in it; and to compleat and make up this unpardonable Sin, there is,

Fifthly, Malice in the Heart; without this, this ſin cannot be committed: It muſt be a malicious oppoſing of the known Truth; that is, when Men being once enlightned, and taſted of the heavenly Gifts, and the good *Word* of God, and have been partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have had ſome fore-taſt of Heaven, he comes at laſt to take a diſlike, and to hate the holy *Ways* of God, and maliciouſly oppoſe and proſecute them,

them, and to lye in despite to the Spirit of Grace, crucifying afresh the Son of God, and putting him to open shame.

Now a Man having gone thus far, he comes in the last Place to be an Apostate; for thus to oppose wilfully and maliciously to known Truth, is always joyned with final and total Apostacy; and he that is so far enlightned, as to see the evil of sin, and the excellency of Christ and Holiness, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, of his Grace and Comforts, and tasteth of God's Love and Favour in Jesus Christ, and has some fore-tast of the Joys of the *World* to come; now for such a one wilfully, spitefully, and maliciously to fall away, he so falls, as never to rise more. It is true, the Children of God fall, and that often, yet rise again; but when they fall thro' Infirmity, and not wilfully and maliciously; but these wicked wretches fall wilfully and maliciously and so fall finally. Against such, the Door of Mercy is always shut; concerning such, St. *Peter* saith, *It had been better for them not to have known the Way of Righteousness, then after they have known to turn from the holy Commandments delivered unto them.* But it happen'd unto them according to the Proverb; *The Dog is turned unto his Vomit again; and the Sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the Mire*, 2 Pet. 2. 21, 22.

There is another dreadful place of the Scripture against those kind of Apostates; that is, *Heb.* 10. 26. *For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation.* Thus I have given you five steps, and so many links in a chain all which makes up the unpardonable Sin against

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the Holy Ghoſt. It is a wilful and malicious oppoſing the known Truth, joyned with final Apoſtacy. Thus I have ſhewed you, as plain as I can, what this ſin unto Death is. Now to proceed:

Secondly, The next thing to be conſidered, is, that all other ſins of Blaſphemy, whatſoever, may be forgiven, may our ſins be ever ſo great, and many, tho' we be the vileſt Wretches that ever liv'd, yet there is hopes of Pardon upon Repentance. *Manaſſes* was the vileſt Sinner that ever we read of, yet he repented, and was pardoned: Alſo, *Mary Magdalen* was the chief of Sinners, for out of her came ſeven Devils; yet becauſe ſhe loved much, much was forgiven her. A Man may be a Whoremonger, an Adulterer, and work Witchcraft, and deal with familiar Spirits, and yet at laſt may repent and be ſaved; and yet I have heard talk of ſome that are ſo fooliſh, as to take the ſin of Fornication, to be a ſin Unpardonable: For from God's own Words in the fourth Commandment, *I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, viſiting the ſins of the Father unto the third and fourth Generation*: From whence they ſay, that Children that are baſe-born are not ſaved, unto the third and fourth Generation; but this is moſt erroneous Interpretation of God's Word; it is them that hate him, and continue hating him, that he will viſit their Iniquities upon: For Fornicators and Adulterers themſelves may repent and be ſaved; much more the Children who know nothing; nor could help nothing. For Chriſt with his own Mouth tells the *Scribes* and the *Phiraſees*, *Matt* 21.13. *That the Publicans and Harlots ſhall enter into the Kingdom of God before them; for there is no ſin but is pardonable, except the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.* But,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt is alone the ſin unto Death, that is, a ſin Unpardonable, never to be forgiven, neither in this World, nor in the World to come: Nor becauſe the Merits of Chriſt is not ſufficient to Pardon it; for this ſin, as well as all other ſins, are but infinite; whereas the Merits of Chriſt are infinite.

Object. *But what is the reaſon then, that this ſin cannot be forgiven?*

Anſ. This Queſtion brings me to the fourth thing conſiderable: Do but mind me a little, and I will as plain, and as clear as I can, tell you what the Reaſon is.

The Reaſon ariſes from the nature of the ſin; for the ſin, by whom it is committed, burdens the Heart, and ſears the Conſcience, ſo that there is no place for Repentance to be wrought, neither for that, nor any other ſin. This ſin is called the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; not becauſe it is a ſin againſt the Perſon of the Holy Ghoſt, for ſo is all ſin againſt his Perſon, but is call'd the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, becauſe it is againſt the Office and Work of the Holy Ghoſt. Now every one of the three Perſons have their particular Work: The Work of the Father is to create; the Worke of the Son is to redeem loſt Sinners; and the Work of the Holy Ghoſt is to enlighten, convince, ſanctify, and convert them. Now a Man committing this Unpardonable Sin, rejects all this Work of the Spirit. Now for a Man to be throughly enlightned by the Holy Ghoſt, that he comes to know the Evil of Sin, and of his loſt and undone Condition without Chriſt, and that none but the Merits of Chriſt can ſave him, then for him wilfully to oppoſe him, and the Work of his Spirit, and will not be beholding to him for Salvation;

Salvation; now, for such a one to be forgiven, is utterly impossible.

Object. *But why is this impossible? Nothing is impossible with God.*

Answ. Nothing is impossible with God that does imply a Contradiction: But for God to forgive sin committed against the Holy Ghost, implies a Contradiction. For how can he have Pardon given him that utterly rejects it? As for instance; a Man through Ignorance, may deny Christ, and maliciously fall from the profession of the Truth, into all kind of Wickedness, as did St. *Paul*, and the *Jews* that crucified Christ; and yet not falling from Light and Knowledge, there is room for the Holy Ghost to work upon him, to enlighten him, and to convince him of his Folly, and so make way for Conversion. And besides, a Man, after he hath been enlightened, and falls back, thro' infirmity and weakness of the Flesh, (as St. *Peter* did) and doth not fall wilfully and maliciously, then the Holy Ghost may work upon him, and renew him again, and work in him a deep Sorrow for abusing so much Love and Mercy; and so carry on his good Work unto Salvation. But for a Man when he is once enlightned by the Holy Ghost, and has had some taste of God's Love and Favour, and some fore-taste of the Joys of Heaven, and then at last utterly oppose this illuminating Work of the Spirit, and wilfully and maliciously to fall away, and so reject the Spirit's renewing Work. Alas! then the Holy Ghost has done; he has nothing more that he can Work in him; his enlightning Work, his convincing Work, his sanctifying Work, he has utterly rejected Christ's Pardon, Heaven and all. Now this poor Wretch is past all hopes of Mercy, all

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hopes of Pardon, nay, for such a one we are forbidden for to pray, as you see in the Verse whereof my Text is part. Now Christ pray'd for them that maliciously crucified him, *Luke* 23. 34. saying, *Father forgive them, for they knew not what they did.* Alas! They knew not what they were doing; for had they knew it, they would have not crucified the Lord of Glory, 1 *Cor.* 2. 8. But if they had known, and yet crucified him, Christ would have spent his Breath to pray for them; but it would have been utterly in vain: For when a Man has committed this Unpardonable Sin, all the Prayers of Heaven, nor Earth, can do him good; for as the Text saith, *There is a Sin unto Death.*

I shall conclude all with a few Words of Application, and will be as short as possible, because this Discourse will be too large for so small a Book. Here is, First, a Word of Comfort: Secondly, a Word of Councel.

First, A Word of Comfort: It may be with reading and hearing of this Discourse your Hearts begin to ach with fear that you have committed this Unpardonable Sin: But I think I have sufficiently proved to you what it is; and I tell you again, that there are but few that can commit it; nay, there are Millions that are tormented in Hell, yet never committed this Sin: Nay, further, an Ignorant *Protestant* may thro' weakness, and out of slavish fear, turn *Papist*, and renounce his Profession, and yet not commit this Unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost; for doing it out of Ignorance and Infirmity, there may be Matter left for the Holy Ghost to work upon, whereby he may be converted and saved. Consider this also, if you are afraid that you have committed it,

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and wish that you had not committed it, if it were to do again, then it it's a true Sign that you have not committed it.

Secondly, I must conclude, also, with a Word of Councel: First, Watch very diligently against all sin: but above all, take special heed of those sins that come near the Unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, and they are these; Hypocrisy taking only the outward Profession of Religion, and so dissembling and mocking God; sinning wilfully against Conviction of Conscience, and against great Light and Knowledge; sinning Presumptiously, and with an high Hand: These sins, tho' none of them are the direct sin against the Holy Ghost, yet they come very near to it: Therefore, take special heed of them, least they in time, should bring you to commit that Unpardonable sin. And,

Lastly, *Labour to be sincere in Religion, and by a true Faith engraft your selves into Christ, for they that be with Christ can never commit this Unpardonable sin: For know this, above all the sins committed by fallen Mankind there is one sin, that is a sin unto Death, which is the Unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: Which whosoever commits it hath no Forgiveness neither in this World, nor in the World to come.*

Consider what hath been said, and the Lord give you Understanding.

FINIS.